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RACHEL CROTHERS

EXPRESSING WILLIE

BAKER'S ROYALTY PLAYS

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NORMAN LEE SWARTOUT
Summit New Jersey

Walter H. Baker Company, Boston

COLLEGE OF THE PACIFIC

College of the Pacific
Stockton, Calif.

EXPRESSING WILLIE

A Comedy in Three Acts

By

RACHEL CROTHERS

Author of "39 East" — "Mary The Third"

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NORMAN LEE SWARTOUT
Summit

BOSTON
WALTER H. BAKER COMPANY
1925

FROM
NORMAN LEE SWARTOUT
SUMMIT, NEW JERSEY

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Summit New Jersey

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EXPRESSING WILLIE

A Comedy in Three Acts

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EXPRESSING WILLIE

The Cast as first presented at Forty Eighth Street Theatre, New York, April 16, 1924.

MINNIE WHITCOMB ..... *Crystal Herne*
WILLIE SMITH ..... *Richard Sterling*
MRS. SMITH ..... *Louise Closser Hale*
TALIAFERRO ..... *Alan Brooks*
GEORGE CADWALADER ..... *Warren William*
DOLLY CADWALADER ..... *Molly McIntyre*
FRANCES SYLVESTER ..... *Merle Maddern*
SIMPSON ..... *Douglas Garden*
REYNOLDS ..... *John Gerard*
JEAN ..... *Louise Waller*
GORDEN ..... *James Bell*

SYNOPSIS

ACT 1: The Living Room in the home of Willie Smith.

ACT 2: Scene 1 — Same as Act 1.
Scene 2 — Willie's Bedroom.

ACT 3: Same as Act 1.

TIME — The present.

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ACT I

TIME: *The present. A Saturday afternoon in spring.*

PLACE: *The ridiculously magnificent house of Willie Smith on Long Island.*

The room is the most pronounced type of the overdone Italian in America. Its lofty spaces and emptiness leave it cold and formal. The few fine old pieces of furniture and tapestry emphasize the space rather than fill it.

Two steps at the back leading up into the hall make an impressive entrance into the room.

As the curtain rises—two women are standing in the center of the room rather clinging together and looking lost and grotesquely out of place.

One is a small spare woman with an extremely sharp and intelligent face. She is about sixty-five and a shrewd practical strength and dominance make her a striking little figure in spite of her plainness, which the very good and dignified, though somewhat passee black gown does not conceal but rather accentuates.

The other woman, who is holding on to the older one and looking rapturously about the room, is tall and thin and utterly drab in personality. Her clothes look as though she had been traveling and are generally limp and nondescript in effect. The hat is a little askew and has a faint suggestion of an attempt

to be becoming and artistic with its rather wide brim and pale rose. Her face has a persistent sweetness and appeal. She looks wonderingly and admiringly at others, not expecting to be looked at or admired herself.

MINNIE [*In awe-struck tones*]. It's marvelous—perfectly marvelous! I feel as if I were standing in an old palace or something. It's unreal. I know I'll wake up and find I'm back home. I've dreamed what it would be like but I never dreamed anything as magnificent as this. It's marvelous!

MRS. SMITH. It cost an awful lot of money, Minnie. The most expensive architect in the country built it and the most costly interior decorator decorated it and he's bought everything there is to be bought in Europe and America. They call this the living room—but nobody lives in it. Willie's in the city all day and I stay up in my own room with a little of my old furniture I saved when he began getting rid of things—and the servants rattle around down here eating their heads off. He's got twenty now—all told—inside and out.

MINNIE. Twenty what?

MRS. SMITH. Twenty servants.

MINNIE. Oh my! It's like a book, isn't it? I just can't believe it! How proud and happy you must be, Mrs. Smith! Oh, how proud and happy!

MRS. SMITH. Shucks! I'm a lonely old woman, Minnie, and Willie's a lonely man.

MINNIE. How could he be? He's a prince among men now. Every paper you read—every magazine you pick up has his picture in it and an article about his

phenomenal fortune and the phenomenal way he made it.

MRS. SMITH. Well this is what it's bought him—an empty house.

MINNIE. I should think it would be full all the time of interesting important people.

MRS. SMITH. It would be easy enough to fill it up. [*She stops a moment—listening.*] You out there in the hall, Simpson?

SIMPSON [*A very perfect footman appearing in the entrance*]. Yes, Madam!

MRS. SMITH. You needn't hang around. Go see they get this young lady's trunk put in the right room.

SIMPSON. Very good, Madam. [*He retires with dignity.*]

MRS. SMITH [*Whispering*]. They listen so you can't breathe but they hear it. I'm having you right next to mine so you won't be scared. What was I talking about? Oh yes, it would be easy enough to fill it up, but Willie don't want anything but the best—and the best ain't easy to get.

MINNIE. I don't see how it could be hard for *him now*. Oh, that *chair!* It looks as if kings have sat in it. And there's one of those things I've never seen before. [*Looking at the prie dieux.*] He's a great man *now*.

MRS. SMITH. He's a *rich* man. You see he hasn't married anybody yet.

MINNIE. That seems so strange.

MRS. SMITH. He came nearer to marrying you than he ever has anybody since.

MINNIE. Oh don't let's talk about that, Mrs. Smith.

That's all over and gone—long, long ago. If it weren't I couldn't have come. Your letter was so sweet and made me feel so comfortable. I was awfully proud to come of course. The whole town's excited about it. They've always said you both were completely weaned away from everybody—and then when your letter did come, it was just—— [*Her voice breaks slightly.*]

Mrs. Smith. You're a good woman, Minnie. You certainly deserve a little rest and change from drudgery. I've been a long time doing this—a long time inviting you—but I had to wait 'till he suggested it himself.

Minnie. Oh *did* he? Of course I know he lives in another world now—entirely. What a beautiful piano! Who plays on it?

Mrs. Smith. Nobody. Minnie, I'm worried about Willie.

Minnie. Oh my! Why? His health?

Mrs. Smith. No—worse'n that. He's bitten with a new thing entirely.

Minnie. Oh dear! What?

Mrs. Smith. He's too smart for just the ordinary thing that's chasin' after rich people—but this is an *idea*—rather than just the people themselves, and it's the first time I've ever been scared about his common sense. Willie's as smart—as shrewd as they make 'em in business. He's been up against the biggest of 'em—but something's got in under his skin now that I'm afraid of.

Minnie. What? What *is* it?

Mrs. Smith. All kinds of women have chased him,

but up to now *I've* always been the most important woman in his life. I've always been able to steer him without letting him know it.

MINNIE. Is it a woman?

MRS. SMITH. No—it's an idea—but there's a woman mixed up in it and she *might* get him through that. She *might*, and it's the only thing on earth that could take him away from me unless I want him to be taken. [*A sudden vehemence and jealousy showing itself.*]

MINNIE. What *is* the idea?

MRS. SMITH. It's making him think there's something *great* shut up inside of him which has never been found out. It's making him think he's a great man *all by himself*—without his money.

MINNIE. But he *is*—isn't he?

MRS. SMITH. Willie's about as great as my foot. Who made him? *I* did. Who began it all back there in Tuckerville? *I* did. Who nagged him and prodded him and pushed him and *beat* it into him that there *was* a fortune in the toothpaste if it was only put before the public right? Me—*me*— and I don't propose to let a woman who's as foreign to us as the north pole come along and turn his head and get the money and then throw him away like a sucked orange.

MINNIE. But *would* she? Maybe she loves him.

MRS. SMITH. Shucks!

MINNIE. Maybe he loves her.

MRS. SMITH. Willie ain't the loving kind. The usual thing in a woman don't get him at all. If it was just that I wouldn't turn a hair. How old are you now, Minnie? Thirty, ain't you?

MINNIE. Yes. Yes I am. It's really thirty-one.

MRS. SMITH. Well—you look it—but there's no disgrace in that. Willie came nearer lovin' you than he ever did anybody.

MINNIE. Oh, Mrs. Smith!

MRS. SMITH. If you hadn't been quite so fond of him, I expect you would have got him. Lord, Minnie I haven't seen a woman blush like that since I left Tuckerville. You see he hasn't forgotten or he wouldn't have invited you.

MINNIE. Isn't it wonderful that he hasn't?

MRS. SMITH. Don't be so meek and humble. That always was your trouble. Now you run along upstairs and put on the best thing you've got and I'll send for you when Willie comes. He'll want to show you the rest of the house himself, and tell you what everything is and where it came from. That's about all there is to it—the telling about it. See—[*Pointing through a window*] the house sticks way out on that side and way out on the other. You could put an army in it. Mind these slippy floors. I tell Willie the only thing this room is fit for is a skating rink. Simpson! [*Raising her voice.*] He'll take you up, and don't be too long. [SIMPSON *appears from the left and* REYNOLDS, *a footman, from the inner door at center.*] Umm—well—one of you take this young lady up to her room.

SIMPSON. Very good, Madam. [*He silently directs* REYNOLDS *to lead the way and steps back for* MINNIE *to pass.* REYNOLDS *exits at left.*]

MRS. SMITH. And Minnie, if you don't find everything you want you just ring one of those bells and

somebody will come and get it for you—no matter *what* it is.

MINNIE [*As she stands on the top step and looks back into the room*]. Oh my! It *is* a fairy tale. It makes me wish I were a wonderful person for the first time in my life. It makes me want to speak out something—that has never been said. Something beautiful and great. [*She makes a broad vague gesture into the room and stands staring wistfully. A motor horn is faintly heard.*] Oh—is that a bugle?

MRS. SMITH. It's *Willie.* He always blows three times so I'll know it's him. Go on. Scuttle up the stairs. I don't want him to see you yet. [*She motions* MINNIE *out frantically.* SIMPSON *follows* MINNIE *off.*]

[MRS. SMITH *listens a moment, then turns back into the room—waiting with a nervousness which even her grit doesn't quite control.*]

MRS. SMITH [*After a moment—calling sharply*]. Willie!

WILLIE [*From the hall*]. Hello!

MRS. SMITH. Here. I'm in here.

WILLIE [*Appearing in the doorway*]. Well—Snooks, what are you doing down here?

MRS. SMITH. Oh, I'm just lookin' round to see if everything's all right before you—before anybody gets here. I've been all over the house to see that there's soap enough.

WILLIE [*Laughing at her affectionately*]. Nobody here yet?

MRS. SMITH. No—not yet.

WILLIE [*As* SIMPSON *comes to take his coat and hat*]. Oh Simpson,—are there flowers in all the rooms?

SIMPSON. Yes, sir.

WILLIE. Send the Rolls to the four-fifteen. One gentleman will come by that. The others will be motoring down. Have the other garage opened up and put Raymond in charge.

SIMPSON. Very good, sir.

WILLIE. And have my car put up and the Mercedes brought round. I may want it.

SIMPSON. Yes, sir. [*He goes.*]

WILLIE [*Coming down into the room*]. I thought I'd get out earlier but I got caught in a jam at the office.

[WILLIE *is thirty-five—a fairly good looking typical American—radiating health and energy—thoroughly conscious of his success and power. There is still a very wholesome commonplaceness about him which his millions and his strikingly correct clothes cannot hide. He beams at his mother with honest devotion.*]

WILLIE. Well, Mother—I like to see you down here.

MRS. SMITH. Where you going to put her?

WILLIE. Who?

MRS. SMITH. *The* woman—Mrs. Sylvester.

WILLIE. At the end of the south corridor—overlooking the sunken garden. She'll appreciate that effect more than any of them. And Mr. and Mrs. Cadwalader in a suite in the north wing and Taliaferro over on my side.

MRS. SMITH. There isn't any danger of any of 'em staying longer than Monday morning, is there?

WILLIE [*Chuckling*]. No. Why?

MRS. SMITH. I'm going to stay up in my room. I'm not coming down at all.

WILLIE. Of course you are. What do you mean?

MRS. SMITH. I've changed my mind.

WILLIE. You can't do it. That's ridiculous—and I want them to see you. Anybody who knows me knows I've got a great mother.

MRS. SMITH. So long as you know it and I know—it don't matter a fig whether anybody else does or not.

WILLIE [*Laughing at her with pride and affection*]. You're not a very modest little violet, are you?

MRS. SMITH. Modesty never got anybody anywhere till after you're *there.* Then modesty's a great virtue.

WILLIE. But I want you to *see* these people.

MRS. SMITH. I've seen all kinds come and go. They'll soon blow over.

WILLIE. That's where you're wrong. I've struck my gait at last. I like them better than any I've ever known in my life.

MRS. SMITH. Oh—you do?

WILLIE. Yes, I do. They satisfy me. They're free and broad and *real.*

MRS. SMITH. They know your money's real too.

WILLIE. Rot, mother. These people don't care anything about my money.

MRS. SMITH. Oh, they don't?

WILLIE. Not a hang. They've gone way beyond money.

MRS. SMITH. Oh, they have?

WILLIE. They're not the ordinary aristocrat. They're idealists—with *vision,*

MRS. SMITH. When you say *they* I s'pose you mean *her*.

WILLIE. N-o—not exactly. Though I do think Mrs. Sylvester has opened up more for me—made me see more than anyone else *ever* has.

MRS. SMITH. Oh. What's she made you see?

WILLIE. That absolute freedom—the *expression of oneself*—is the most important and developing thing in the world.

MRS. SMITH. Well, I'll put you to the test and see how developed you are. Minnie's here.

WILLIE. What Minnie?

MRS. SMITH. What Minnie? Minnie Whitcomb that you grew up with and almost married and got tired of and dropped like an old shoe. *Your* Minnie.

WILLIE. Here? Where?

MRS. SMITH. Right here in this house. She's come to your week-end party.

WILLIE. Good Heavens, mother, she can't.

MRS. SMITH. *Can't?* She's here. She's come.

WILLIE. How'd she get here? This is *awful*.

MRS. SMITH. Now Willie—are you a big man or a little one? We've owed this to Minnie a long time and I just made up my mind not to put it off any longer. I invited her.

WILLIE. What in——

MRS. SMITH. And I told her *you* did too. I said "*we*" in the letter or I knew she wouldn't come.

WILLIE. *What did you do it for?*

MRS. SMITH. Minnie's always been on my conscience and she *ought* to be on yours.

WILLIE. Well, she's *not*. Why *now?* Why *this* time of all others?

MRS. SMITH. I didn't want her to come and find us in a perfectly empty house. It's just *the* time.

WILLIE. It's just the time to ruin the whole business. This party means an awful lot to me, Mother. It will change my whole—— Where is she?

MRS. SMITH. Upstairs.

WILLIE. What does she look like?

MRS. SMITH. Just the same as she used to.

WILLIE. That'll be nice. Why didn't you—— There's something darned queer about this. Why didn't you tell me you were going to do it?

MRS. SMITH. Because I knew you'd act just exactly the way you *are* actin'.

WILLIE. I'm stumped. I don't know *what* to do.

MRS. SMITH. Do? You're goin' to make her welcome. Minnie's a good girl.

WILLIE. I bet she is. Lord, Mother, when you get set on a thing you *are* a mule.

MRS. SMITH. I'd rather be a mule than a fool any day. Come on—let's get it over with. *Simpson!*

WILLIE. Don't, mother! Don't yell like that. Ring—*ring*. [*Pulling the bell rope himself.*]

MRS. SMITH. My voice is better than any bell in the house. I can sit still and use it. God knows I've helped you to get everything *you* wanted, Willie—with everything in me. Now this is something *I* want and I—— [SIMPSON *appears.*] Tell the young lady to come down.

SIMPSON. She's just here on the stairs now, Madam.

MRS. SMITH. Oh—well—you go away then.

[Simpson *disappears. They wait, watching the entrance. After a moment* Minnie *comes into it. She is wearing a dress of some thin blue material. It is provincial and tame, but it emphasizes her pale sweetness and there is something in her long thinness which is half awkward and half beautiful—a grace which has never asserted itself, because of her extreme shyness and self depreciation. She stands on the top step now—looking at* Willie *with frightened appealing eyes.*]

Mrs. Smith. Well, Minnie, here's Willie. He's just been saying how glad he is to see you.

Willie [*After a slight pause*]. How are you, Minnie? [*He moves towards her with his hand out. She goes down the steps and slips just as she gets to him—throwing out her arms and grasping him to save herself.*]

Mrs. Smith. There, I told you so! That's not her fault. [Willie *disengages himself.*] Sit down, Minnie. Put her in a chair, Willie.

Minnie. Oh no. I'm all right now. It was clumsy of me to do that. I can shake hands now. [*Putting out her hand again.*]

Willie [*Taking her hand uncomfortably*]. How are you, Minnie? How are you? I hope you're well.

Minnie. Oh, yes, thank you, I'm well. Are you well? You look *wonderful.*

Willie. Thanks. Did you—have a—good trip—*on?*

Minnie. Oh yes, I——

Mrs. Smith. No, she didn't. It was hot and cindery.

WILLIE. Yes, I suppose it is very hot in the middle West this time of year.

MRS. SMITH. It always has been and it always will be. Minnie likes the house.

MINNIE. Oh, it's beautiful. And you were so good to invite me to come and see it.

WILLIE [*After a quick look at his mother*]. It's supposed to be one of the best examples of its period.

MRS. SMITH. I haven't told her about your party yet.

WILLIE. Oh—well—a—— [MINNIE *looks questioningly from one to the other.*]. I have some people coming for the week-end—a—over Sunday you know. They'll be arriving soon.

MINNIE. I'm sure you know wonderful people now, Willie.

WILLIE. *I* like them but I think you might have enjoyed yourself more some other time. What I mean to say *is*—these people will seem very strange to you.

MINNIE. I'd like that. The stranger the better. I've seen so little that *is* strange.

MRS. SMITH. Of course. Why travel if everything's just like it is at home?

WILLIE. But what I mean to say is—I'm going to be very frank with you, don't let them see that you're surprised at anything. Just agree and drift along —easy.

MRS. SMITH. Why should she agree when she *don't?*

WILLIE. I'm trying to *explain*, Mother. They speak a different language. They've *had* everything and *done* everything and they're going on after something *further*—that is, after something further than

life as it's ordinarily understood. They're after the *overtones*—so to speak.

MRS. SMITH. The what?

MINNIE. Oh I know. It's a musical term.

WILLIE. That makes me think. Don't say anything about giving music lessons. They wouldn't understand that.

MINNIE. Oh.

WILLIE. Music—in the abstract—yes—that's a good thing to talk about. You can say you're *fond* of music.

MRS. SMITH. But don't tell 'em you've been smart enough to take care of yourself and your good-for-nothing father most of your life by giving piano lessons. Don't tell 'em anything as bad as *that*.

WILLIE. Now mother——

MINNIE. I know what he means. It takes the music out of music when you think of teaching it. I know. I won't.

WILLIE. And by the way—I'll call you Miss Whitcomb, of course.

MINNIE. And shall I call you Mr. Smith?

MRS. SMITH. Rubbish!

WILLIE. And don't wait to be introduced. It isn't done much. I've been in places where they don't introduce people at all. Sometimes I go right up to a person and say "My name's Smith"—See? And that's enough. It's stiff to——

REYNOLDS [*Coming from the outer entrance at C.*]. I beg pardon, sir. A motor is drawing up. I think the—

MRS. SMITH. I'm going. You stay here, Minnie.

[REYNOLDS *goes out C.*]

MINNIE. Oh no, I'll go with you.

MRS. SMITH. No, no—no you don't. You keep her there, Willie.

WILLIE. Keep still. Wait, mother. Don't be running out like that. You——

[MRS. SMITH *scrambles up the steps and out.*]

MINNIE [*Panic stricken*]. Where shall I go?

WILLIE [*Suddenly nervous and trying not to be*]. Don't go any place. Keep still. Sit down. [MINNIE *starts carefully to a chair, almost sitting.*] No don't. Don't do *anything!*

[MINNIE *takes long careful steps and gets to the other side of the piano, standing uncomfortably by it.* WILLIE *goes to the steps and waits.*]

TALIAFERRO [*Coming into the entrance after* REYNOLDS *has entered and stood aside for him*]. Well—here I am.

WILLIE [*Trying to be equal to this important moment*]. Oh hello Taliaferro—hello. How are you? Glad to see you.

[TALIAFERRO *is about forty, tall, slender, and over elaborate in his grace and flamboyant distinction. His great surety of his own importance and his very nonchalant indifference towards others is amusing and charming rather than disagreeable—since under the pose and the ego are a very quick sympathy and a warmth of keen appreciation.*]

TALIAFERRO [*Staying on the steps and looking about —ignoring* WILLIE'S *hand*]. It makes a very noble impression. The approach is good. I'd heard it was bad—but it's really very good. About as well done

as it can be in America. I congratulate you, Smith. If one *must* live in a new house, it's very good. How are you? [*He comes down and shakes hands with* WILLIE *but still looks about the room.*] Oh yes—oh yes. Burton always builds a house—but he builds for *himself*—not for the people who are going to live in it. How do you feel in it? How do *you* feel? [WILLIE *is getting ready to answer.*] You don't feel at all of course. You're just making motions—and you never will, my dear man, you never will. Only you'll never know it, so what does it matter? Only it does matter. Those are just the things that *do* matter. Oh God *how* they matter! [MINNIE *is getting ready for anything that may be expected of her, but no one looks at her.*] I can't paint you in this house, Smith—if that's what you want. I shall have to take you out of it. Of course, if you want a photograph—with this background—*yes*—go to anybody—anybody—but if you want *yourself* painted—if you want *me* I shall take you out of this.

WILLIE [*Trying to be nonchalant*]. What would you suggest?

TALIAFERRO. I shan't have to do any suggesting. It will come to me—out of you—so strongly that—Oh—— [MINNIE *comes from behind the piano and moves toward them as bravely as possible*]. Oh no—I see. [*Putting a glass in his eye*] Something quite different. I thought for a moment I could paint this lady in this room.

WILLIE. Do you know Miss Whitcomb? She's staying in the house.

TALIAFERRO. Should I? Are you anything in particular?

[MINNIE *is about to speak.*]

WILLIE. Miss Whitcomb is a musician. Will you come up to your room, now?

TALIAFERRO. Oh no. I'm not one of those guests who stay in the bath most of the time. I'll chat with my fellow artist if you don't mind.

WILLIE. Well—I——

TALIAFERRO. Oh you *do* mind?

WILLIE. Certainly *not*. I'll jump into something comfortable. I've just got out myself. Won't be a minute. This is the great Taliaferro, Miss Whitcomb. You mustn't mind what he says. He tells the truth to us all. [WILLIE *runs up the steps and off R. with as much swank as possible.*]

TALIAFERRO. That's why they call me eccentric. There's nothing so strange as the truth. A—I keep thinking you're beautiful and then I see that you aren't. That's a pity. You should have been. [*He comes closer to* MINNIE, *staring at her through his glass much to her painful embarrassment.*] Oh, I'm not talking about your nose. What have you done or not done that has kept you from being beautiful?

MINNIE. Oh nothing could have made me beautiful.

TALIAFERRO. *Ah*—fear. That's what it is—*fear*. I get that. What are you afraid of? Don't you feel your own greatness?

MINNIE. Oh I'm not a great person.

TALIAFERRO. Ah, my dear lady, the most commonplace of us have greatness in us but we don't know

how to use it. The great truth of life is shut up in us tight and we go on like apes—imitating each other—instead of giving out—*out* the something which is in each one of us quite different from in any other. The naked truth of *any* soul is important. Tell me—have you killed something which should have lived? Oh I don't mean details. I'm not interested in facts. Have you stifled something which might have been a real contribution to life?

MINNIE. I've never even dared to think of it like that.

TALIAFERRO. But you *do* think it.

MINNIE [*With a sudden passionate appeal*]. But is it *true?* Have we all something to give which matters whether we give it or not?

TALIAFERRO [*Responding instantly with tenderness and understanding*]. We have *ourselves*—that inner-self which is trying to break through. Have you never listened? Have you never let it speak to you? Have you never let it tell you your own power?

MINNIE. Do you mean what you're saying? I mean—do you *really mean it?*

TALIAFERRO [*Becoming bombastic again*]. There you are! We're so used to empty words that do nothing but *hide* us. Why should I speak to you at all if not to try to reach the *real* person in you. You don't show me what you are for fear I'll think it worthless. *I'm* the modest person. I give you all I am—out—open—naked.

MINNIE. It must be wonderful to feel that way.

TALIAFERRO. It is indeed. Why don't *you?* Why don't you let go?

MINNIE. I don't know how. I didn't know I ought to.

TALIAFERRO. You haven't tried.

MINNIE. But how can I? How can I try without being ridiculous?

TALIAFERRO. Why not be ridiculous and be alive? You've shut yourself in with fear. Is that all there is to you?

MINNIE. There might have been something else. Is it my fault that there isn't?

TALIAFERRO. Oh the *might-have-beens!* How we like to blame them.

MINNIE. *Could* there have been great love and great music in me—or have I only imagined it?

TALIAFERRO. Imagination, dear lady, is creation. You haven't used your imagination strongly enough. Great love and great music are magnificent ambitions. You're either seeing yourself too large or too small. Free yourself—*free* yourself and find out the truth. If you've *let* things overpower you—for instance if you've let this commonplace man command you to come and play for him——

MINNIE. What commonplace man?

TALIAFERRO. Smith.

MINNIE. Oh—*he* isn't commonplace.

TALIAFERRO. You see!—You've let his belongings overshadow you. You've let——

DOLLY [*Coming into the entrance*]. Hello Tollie. [DOLLY *is extremely smart and alert and sure of herself, but her conceit is very good-natured and comfortable for others. She is followed down the steps by* GEORGE CADWALADER, *her husband.* GEORGE *is not*

so sure but he's large and pleasant and altogether a very desirable person to have about.]

TALIAFERRO. Hello, Dolly. Hello, George. [*Leaving* MINNIE *and going up to shake hands with the others.*]

GEORGE. Hello. How are you?

DOLLY [*Looking about*]. My God it *is* big, isn't it?

TALIAFERRO. Yes, it would be.

DOLLY. It's a scream. It makes me feel like a peanut.

GEORGE. Shut up, Dolly. Good idea if something *could* make you feel a little smaller.

DOLLY. Where is he? Where is our royal host?

TALIAFERRO. I believe he's jumping into something comfortable.

DOLLY. Oh, *is* he? I don't see anything comfortable here to jump into. Awful! [*Sitting in the large chair.*] Is Frances here?

TALIAFERRO. I haven't seen her.

DOLLY. She'll make an entrance, of course. I wouldn't miss seeing Frances come down those steps for the first time for anything on earth. Doesn't the house look as if he had built it for her? How she will drape herself around it! Are you going to paint him?

TALIAFERRO. I'm n-o-t sure. I haven't found the real man yet.

DOLLY. That's easy. He's a dear sweet disgustingly rich thing who doesn't know what to do with himself. When I think how divinely delightful George would be with this money, it makes me positively ill.

GEORGE. Shut up Dolly.—Do you think we're expected?

TALIAFERRO. [*Laughing as he stretches comfortably on a seat*]. I'm sure I don't know whether you are or not.

DOLLY. Of course we are.

GEORGE. I think we got the wrong date.

DOLLY. Of course we haven't. George is bored stiff because I made him come. It's a splendid chance for him to make an impression. There's no telling what Mr. Smith might do if he really knew George.

TALIAFERRO. No—there's no telling.

GEORGE [*Discovering* MINNIE]. Shut up Dolly. You're not the only person in the you know.

MINNIE [*Smiling bravely and coming forward*]. My name is Minnie.

DOLLY [*Looking at her and laughing*]. Oh is it really? How do you do?

MINNIE. I mean Whitcomb. Minnie isn't my name at all. I don't know why I said that.

TALIAFERRO. No it couldn't be. Minnie's much too mincing for you. I seem to see you on a *large* scale somehow. Minerva—possibly yes.

MINNIE. Oh that is my real name.

TALIAFERRO. Ah yes—I got that.

DOLLY. I notice you get most things after you've been told, old dear.

TALIAFERRO. Well, that's more than most people do at that.

DOLLY [*Laughing again*]. That's so all right—my friend. Do you see yourself on a large scale? [*Smiling impertinently at* MINNIE.]

MINNIE [*Not quite sure whether she's being laughed at or treated with very kind attention*]. Oh dear no. Oh no, no.

TALIAFERRO. She doesn't see herself *at all.* She doesn't know anything about herself.

MINNIE. I only know I'm not what I'd like to be.

DOLLY. And what would you like to be?

MINNIE. I'd like to be—Oh, I don't think I could tell you.

WILLIE [*Rushing in and down the steps*]. *So* sorry. I didn't know you were here. [*He gives a sharp questioning look at* MINNIE *which sends her back into shyness again.*] How are you, Cadwalader? Awfully glad to see you. How are you, Mrs. Cadwalader? [*He shakes hands with great dash.*]

DOLLY. I'm mad about the house. It looks *just* like you. I could have told it was yours with my eyes shut.

WILLIE. Think so? I'm glad to hear you say that. I've tried to keep it simple and homelike.

DOLLY. Yes, it's about as homelike as the Metropolitan Museum. Come, come don't be swanky. You know you're bursting with pride and I'm so envious I simply can't bear it. Life's too dreadful. George is so magnificently clever and nobody knows it. Speak up, Georgie, and tell this great man how clever you are.

GEORGE. Shut up, Dolly. It's hot—don't you think?

DOLLY. George thinks it's hot. Do you think it's hot? Yes, we all think it's hot. Well—that's *that.*

WILLIE [*With great pride in his guests*]. It certainly is great to see you here.

[TALIAFERRO *is talking to* MINNIE *and* GEORGE *has gone over to them.*]

DOLLY. We brought our riding breeches. I hear you have the best stables on Long Island.

WILLIE. Oh—I can give you a fair mount. When will you ride? [*They go to look at the view from the window at L.*]

DOLLY. Early to-morrow morning if I can get George up.

GEORGE [*To* TALIAFERRO]. What do you think of the house? [*Speaking over Minnie's head as she sits on a bench.*]

TALIAFERRO. Oh, the *house* is all right.

GEORGE. What's wrong, then?

TALIAFERRO. It needs somebody in it who has some faint idea of what it's all about.

GEORGE. Wait till Frances gets in it.

TALIAFERRO. You think she's really going in for him, do you?

GEORGE. Of course. Why not? She couldn't let this go, you know.

MINNIE. Is that the lady who's coming?

GEORGE. Oh yes—she's coming.

TALIAFERRO. If she ever gets here. I want my tea. I presume that's waiting for her, too.

MINNIE. I suppose she's a very wonderful person.

TALIAFERRO. Oh yes, she is.

GEORGE. Oh yes, she is. [*Both men laugh.*]

MINNIE. You're *all* so wonderful.

GEORGE [*Forgetting Minnie*]. Any golf around —think?

MINNIE. I say I think you're *all* so wonderful.

TALIAFERRO. Oh, there's sure to be. [*Not listening to Minnie.*]

GEORGE. I'd like to go over to Piping Rock tomorrow if there isn't anything nearer.

MINNIE. I say you're——

TALIAFERRO. He probably has eighteen holes right here on his own place. He wouldn't miss that.

GEORGE. Will you tell me anything he hasn't got?

TALIAFERRO. Everything but a yacht I believe. I'm told he isn't a good sailor.

MINNIE [*Turning from one to the other*]. No, he never did like the water.

GEORGE. And it hasn't occurred to him yet to have one for other people.

MINNIE. I say he never did—

TALIAFERRO. I beg your pardon! Were you saying something to me? [*Bending over her elaborately.*]

MINNIE. I say he never did like the water. But I'm sure if he knew his friends wanted a yacht he'd have one. [*Both men laugh.*] He is so *very, very* generous and thoughtful for other——

TALIAFERRO. There she is.

[*They all turn.* FRANCES SYLVESTER *is in the entrance.*]

FRANCES. Oh, how marvelous! I can't come down yet. I must stop and drink it in.

DOLLY. This is a purple moment!

[MRS. SYLVESTER *is tall and extremely slender—both of which are exaggerated by the very clinging and*

sweeping effect of her clothes. She is frankly made up—her good points embellished and her bad ones made assets. She is outree—fascinating, exotic, unnatural, and courageous enough to get her effect.]

TALIAFERRO. Don't move. It's delightful. We said you'd do it.

FRANCES. Oh you dear people! *Do* I look well here?

DOLLY. Not quite so well as you *think* you do, darling—but very well indeed.

GEORGE. You're stunning, Frances. Never saw you look better. Come on in—the water's fine.

FRANCES. Do come and take my hand from here, Mr. Smith. You haven't said a word to me.

WILLIE [*Going up to take her hand*]. I can't think of anything good enough to say.

FRANCES [*Still holding his hand as she comes down the steps*]. How sweet you are! Don't laugh at me. But I don't want to *speak*. I don't want to say a word. I just want to *feel* it. There is *nothing* that so moves me as wonderful old houses. They're full of the past. They speak to me.

GEORGE. This is a brand new one. There aren't any spooks here.

FRANCES [*Putting her hand on* WILLIE'S *arm*]. There! You see how much feeling it has. I quite forgot it wasn't old. It quite moved me. This room does something to me. I can't tell you just what——

[*She stops at the center posing effectively.*]

MINNIE [*Moving forward impulsively*]. It did to me, too. I know what you mean.

FRANCES. Oh—what have I been saying? I thought we were alone.

WILLIE. Don't you know Miss Whitcomb?

FRANCES. You know I don't, you wretch, and you've let me go on so. I hope you're a very frank person yourself, Miss Whitcomb. What did the room do to you?

MINNIE. It made me feel as though something more than just people ought to be here. It made me feel that unseen things ought to be seen here.

WILLIE [*As Simpson and Reynolds appear*]. Here's the tea. Will you serve it, Mrs. Cadwalader, please?

[*They forget* MINNIE *and turn their attention to the very magnificent tea.*]

DOLLY [*Going to the tea table*]. I suppose you ask me because you think I'm older than Frances. I'm *not!* That's the worst of having a husband in evidence —a divorced woman seems so much younger.

FRANCES [*Seating herself elaborately and then realizing that* MINNIE *is staring at her*]. What is it? Why do you look at me like that?

MINNIE. Because you are so beautiful.

DOLLY. How do you take your tea, dear?

FRANCES. Oh I don't know that I want anything so ordinary. I just want to sit and dream that I'm in Italy again.

DOLLY. Careful of your dreams, old dear. Here, give this to her. [*She fills a cup.*] How do you take your tea—Miss a—Minnie?

MINNIE. Oh just—a—anyway—just anyway.

DOLLY [*Trying not to laugh*]. I'm laughing at *you*, George. You look so funny today somehow.

GEORGE [*Having given a cup to* FRANCES *and going back to the tea table*]. Yes I suppose I do—but control your mirth long enough to give her a lump of sugar.

DOLLY [*Putting the sugar in the cup which is for* MINNIE]. And about four for you, I s'pose, Tollie? I wonder why men take so much sugar in their tea. Has anyone ever thought about it?

TALIAFERRO [*Trying to be heard above the others as they all talk at once*]. Oh—yes. I have given it deep thought. But it's so profound a subject that I must deliberate further.

[GEORGE *strolls over to* MINNIE *with a cup of tea—munching a sandwich as he goes. He stands before her, about to give it to her, but becomes interested in what the others are saying and finally drinks the tea himself.* MINNIE *having reached for it timidly several times gives it up and she is forgotten as she sits watching wistfully.*]

FRANCES. How are you going to paint Mr. Smith, Tollie?

TALIAFERRO. I haven't decided yet.

FRANCES. I wish you didn't have to put him in ordinary clothes. I hope you'll bring out the romance of it all.

DOLLY. Oh—have you had a romance, Mr. Smith?

FRANCES. Don't be stupid, Dolly. I mean the romance of what he's done—of how he's created this great house and filled it with the feeling and tradition of the old world. It's so significant—such a symbol of his character! I seem to see you as a knight—riding with the spirit of *beauty* as your herald.

GEORGE [*Chuckling and going for more tea*]. Put him on a horse, Tollie.

DOLLY. A *wingéd* horse.

SMITH. Don't kid me. I think Taliaferro will put me in a plain business suit as a plain, practical business man.

FRANCES. Horrors! *Never.* Tollie's too penetrating for that.

TALIAFERRO. It will be power, Smith—but not romantic.

DOLLY. You paint *souls*, don't you, Tollie darling?

FRANCES. Oh, I've just had the most inspiring experience of my whole life. You *must* go to this new man. He probed to the very depths of my being and *oh* the things we brought up out of my subconscious! I'm reborn. He's given me wings and flight. That's why this room affected me so—the space of it. I know now what I've been reaching for all my life. Oh what cowards we are not to tell the truth to ourselves! If we would only *use* our power, what Godlike creatures we could be!

MINNIE [*Who has been listening breathlessly*]. But how can we find that power? How can we be what we want to be?

FRANCES. By the help of these great men who are opening the doors for us and teaching us how to know ourselves.

TALIAFERRO [*To* MINNIE *with the fire of sincerity back of his artificial manner*]. You don't need *them.* Do it yourself. They *have* opened doors. They've made a great contribution—but the most important thing which is awakened in the world at the

moment is not *how* we can find our own power—the God within us—but the faith that it *can* be found. That's the thing that's alive in the masses—answering the cry of humanity—the faith that Divine power *is* in us all. It's coming in many ways—through many channels—under many names. It's breaking down old doubt and fear. [*He points at* MINNIE.] Until you *believe* you can *free* that thing that is pounding in you—it will stay shut up in you—torturing you. Until you *let* your soul speak through your music you will never have *lived.*

FRANCES. Oh—music? Is she a musician? Do play for us. That's what this room needs—to be filled with music.

DOLLY. *Do.* That will be a *great* relief. My soul needs relief and Heaven knows George's does.

TALIAFERRO. Play—*now.* [*He looks compelling at* MINNIE—*she rises and starts to the piano with inspiration.* WILLIE, *extremely nervous, takes a step between her and the piano. She looks at him, loses her confidence, slips on a rug and falls sprawling on the floor. They laugh—trying not to.* WILLIE *and* TALIAFERRO *go to* MINNIE *trying to get her up. The others go out into the hall, stifling their laughter.*]

TALIAFERRO [*As they get* MINNIE *to her feet.*] A little more faith, my dear. [*He is on the verge of laughing and goes off to the others.*]

MINNIE [*Overcome with humiliation*]. Oh, I'm so ashamed of myself, Willie. I wouldn't have done that for anything.

WILLIE. You surely weren't going to try to play for *these* people—were you?

MINNIE. Why—yes—I was. I thought you'd like me to. I thought that was one thing I *could* do for you.

WILLIE. I think it's just as well you fell down before you got there. They're only interested in the *best* in the world, you know. You don't seem to understand *yet* who they are.

MINNIE. Oh, they're wonderful.

WILLIE. I told you—you wouldn't know what they were talking about.

MINNIE. Yes, I know you did. I don't think I'll come to the table for dinner. I just don't think I can. I've got afraid somehow.

WILLIE [*Softening*]. I'm sorry. You do what you think best. I—I'm terribly sorry, Minnie. [*He goes out.* MINNIE *moves slowly to the piano and stands looking at it—her hands clenched desperately—an agony of appeal in her face . . .*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

ACT II

SCENE I

The same room.

TIME: *Nine o'clock the same evening. Voices are heard and after a moment,* DOLLY, FRANCES, TALIAFERRO, WILLIE *and* GEORGE *come into the hall and slowly down into the room. They all talk at once—with an air of having dined well and being thoroughly contented with themselves. They are in evening clothes—*DOLLY *very chic and daring—*FRANCES *startling in a rather Oriental creation.*

DOLLY [*Finally heard above the others as she and* WILLIE *stand together*]. Has your musician gone under completely for the night, Mr. Smith?

WILLIE. Y-e-s, I think so. I don't think she'll be able to come down at all. She seemed extremely nervous.

DOLLY. I think you frightened her. She was paralyzed at the thought of playing for you. That's the worst of being a powerful personality—it wipes out everybody else. George is so impressed with you that he can't show off. He's really brilliantly clever you know—but when he starts to say anything to *you,* he thinks "Oh that isn't good enough"—and so he doesn't say it at all.

WILLIE. Oh Mrs. Cadwalader!

DOLLY. Do call me Dolly. And I *must* call you Bill. I'll burst if I don't.

WILLIE. You can call me anything on earth—just so it isn't Willie.

FRANCES [*Moving slowly to them*]. I shall call you William—William the conqueror.

WILLIE. William the *conquered* you mean.

DOLLY. Are you as great a lover as you are everything else?

WILLIE. Try me.

DOLLY. If it weren't for George, I would.

WILLIE. I don't see what George has to do with the case.

DOLLY. Then you're a *very* wicked man.

FRANCES. He's a very *mysterious* one. [*Gazing at him deeply as she waves her large feather fan languorously in his face.*] So many depths. Just as I think I understand him, I feel something elusive—further on.

WILLIE [*Almost blinking in the strong light of their bold adulation*]. Oh I—I think I'm a very plain simple person.

DOLLY. Yes. I expect that's what Napoleon said. By the way don't people tell you you are like Napoleon?

WILLIE. Oh occasionally.

FRANCES. I'm wondering if your mother thinks you are.

WILLIE. N-o—but *I* think *she* is.

DOLLY. Aren't we going to see your mother at all?

WILLIE. Oh I hope so. I hope so. She'll try to get down. It's very unfortunate this headache struck

her just now. But that's the way things happen. Isn't it?

DOLLY. How?

WILLIE. Why—just when you don't want them to.

FRANCES. Oh not with you. You compel things to happen.

WILLIE. I don't do much *compelling* with Mother.

DOLLY. Then she must be the only woman in the world who has resisted you. Oh coffee! [*She leaves them and goes up to the table where* REYNOLDS *and* SIMPSON *are putting the coffee, liquors and whiskey. She calls to* TALIAFERRO *and* GEORGE *who cross to her. There is general talk for a moment.* WILLIE *gives* FRANCES *a cigarette. They stroll to the center as he lights it for her.*]

FRANCES. I'm afraid I'm almost jealous of Dolly.

WILLIE. Why?

FRANCES. Jealous of her audacity—I can see you like it.

WILLIE. You don't think for a minute—I——

FRANCES. You see how frank I am. I've never known anyone who made me want to be as limpidly clear and simple as you do.

WILLIE. Oh! Mrs. Sylvester!

[DOLLY *laughs as she and the two men stroll out onto the balcony at right. Their voices are heard for a moment.*]

FRANCES [*Sitting on a bench below the piano as* REYNOLDS *brings two cups of coffee down to them on a small silver tray*]. No.

WILLIE. Oh! won't you?

FRANCES. No!—no thank you.

WILLIE. Then I won't.

FRANCES. I don't want to be *over* stimulated when I am with you. [WILLIE *laughs.*] Do you know—there isn't anything I couldn't say to you. And there's nothing you could say to me that I wouldn't understand. It's so wonderful to feel that way about a *man.* After the two tragic disappointments in my life—of disillusion and despair—after one has given and given—and found nothing but emptiness and treachery—it's very wonderful to trust a man and feel that he is your *friend.*

WILLIE [*Sitting beside her on the bench*]. That's *fine.*

FRANCES. To understand and to know one is understood—to speak out one's innermost thoughts without restraint—to lay one's self bare—well, that's *living* isn't it?

WILLIE. Yes—I s'pose it is—but it's all new to me—this honesty and freedom business. You've thrown a new light on things entirely. Opened things up for me.

FRANCES. I'd rather hear *that* than anything in the world. If I *have* helped you to know your inner spiritual power then *I* have done something wonderful *too*—William.

WILLIE. But it's awfully hard for me to believe—that—well that I *have* got something great in me. This God in me—I—well—it's *new* to me.

FRANCES. That's the modesty of a great nature.

WILLIE. It's awfully nice of you to say that. But power doesn't amount to much unless we get what we want with it.

FRANCES. But *you* have everything *you* want.

WILLIE. Not everything.

FRANCES. What else could you want?

WILLIE. I think you know what I mean.

FRANCES. No—you must tell me. You must be as frank and open as I am.

WILLIE. I want what money can't buy. I want something that holds itself high—something rare and——

FRANCES. Yes?

WILLIE. And as beautiful as you are.

FRANCES. Oh—that is the most——

TALIAFERRO [*Coming in from the balcony*]. Aren't you coming out to look at the moon—you two?

FRANCES. Oh Tollie, you came at the wrong time.

TALIAFERRO. Shall I go away?

FRANCES. No you've broken the spell. Is there a liqueur there?

WILLIE. What will you have?

FRANCES. Nothing less than nectar.

TALIAFERRO [*To* FRANCES *as* WILLIE *goes to get the liqueur*]. Not a fatal interruption, I hope. I should *be sorry to*—[FRANCES *stops him with her fan. They smile comfortably and understandingly at each other.*] You have an air of great contentment, Frances, that is very becoming. I'm sure your soul is purring softly.

FRANCES [*With a beatific smile*]. Beauty warms one, doesn't it?

TALIAFERRO. You should be very grateful to Mrs. Sylvester, Smith.

WILLIE [*Bringing the liqueur to Frances*]. Grateful? I am.

TALIAFERRO. I mean for what she does to your house. She takes away the crudities and fills it with softness and grace. She gives it a raison d'etre.

WILLIE. Oh, yes! Yes indeed. Yes *indeed!*

FRANCES. Don't listen to him, William. He's laughing at me because I'm like a kitten in the sun when I'm surrounded with things that please me.

WILLIE. Well, it must be very evident how pleased I am to see you here.

TALIAFERRO. That's putting it rather mildly, isn't it? It was inevitable that she should be here. You don't forget that it was in my studio you two met, do you?

WILLIE. Oh no—certainly not. At least I don't.

TALIAFERRO. I foretold this then. I saw you take stock, each of the other, and say "Here at last is something that satisfies me."

FRANCES. Oh, Tollie you embarrass me.

TALIAFERRO. Don't be commonplace, Frances. Aren't you big enough to speak honestly of a great attraction—a great harmony that was fulfilled when you two met and looked and understood?

DOLLY [*Coming in from the balcony, followed by* GEORGE]. The moonlight is ravishing out there. George has just kissed me passionately on my left ear.

GEORGE. Shut up, Dolly.

DOLLY. That's all I'm going to tell. George is so shy. He's afraid somebody will know I do still move him passionately. It flatters me awfully. In fact it's the most flattering thing that can possibly happen to a woman—for her husband to be in love with her. Isn't that so, Tollie? Now if *you* were indecently mad

about me I should know it was only novelty, but for *George* to go on year in and year out——

GEORGE. Oh I say—nobody gives a hang about that, you know.

DOLLY. I think it's a very thrilling topic of conversation. Don't you, Tollie?

TALIAFERRO. Entirely unnatural.

DOLLY [*After laughing at* TALIAFERRO]. I want to dance. Do you dance well, Bill? *Bill* do you dance well—with rhythmic abandon? That's what I should have been—a dancer. That's when I express myself—when I dance.

TALIAFERRO [*As he watches her dance about*]. I should like very much to see you express yourself, Dolly. Too bad we have no music. Too bad your musician failed you, Smith.

DOLLY. Too bad she fell down—so to speak. [*They all laugh.* GEORGE *gives himself another generous whiskey and soda.*]

GEORGE. I thought she was going to be nothing less than Paderewski when she started for the piano—and when she began to fall—I—thought she would never stop.

[*They all laugh again immoderately.* TALIAFERRO *stops seeing* MINNIE *at the entrance. The others turn to look at her and stop laughing, staring at her in wonder. She is the same* MINNIE *in the same blue dress with a new and luminous quality shining within her. The lines of the dress are long and flowing—falling away from her arms and shoulders—leaving her body quite free and well defined. Her hair is lifted into a more important line on her head. She stands*

and moves with grace and beauty—her voice has the vibration of conviction.]

MINNIE. You're still laughing at me. I *was* funny and oh—so stupid to be a coward in all this freedom and beauty and understanding.

[*They watch her in amazement as she comes down the steps.*]

GEORGE [*In a low voice*]. Good for her! She's had a drink.

TALIAFERRO. *No!* You don't understand.

WILLIE [*Nervously—to* MINNIE]. You'd better go back upstairs till you feel better.

MINNIE. Oh no—I can't go *back—now.* [*To* TALIAFERRO.] As you said, what difference does it make whether we're ridiculous or not—so long as we're alive?

TALIAFERRO. Quite so.

FRANCES. What *does* she mean?

MINNIE. I want to play for you. [*She goes to the piano.*]

WILLIE. Minnie—don't, don't try.

MINNIE. Oh, Willie, don't be afraid for me now.

TALIAFERRO. No one can help you—or harm you—but yourself.

[*There is a pause. She begins to play—slowly, softly, a little uncertainly. They watch her tensely. She gains in sureness, and plays with inspiration—her courage mounting as the power and beauty of the music accumulate. She finishes in a crescendo of abandon.* DOLLY, TALIAFERRO *and* GEORGE *all shout bravo, applauding with excitement, exhilarated and honestly thrilled.* FRANCES *doesn't like it—the lime-*

light being taken off herself. WILLIE *is stupefied and extremely nervous as to what is coming next.* TALIAFERRO, DOLLY *and* GEORGE *surround* MINNIE *all talking at once.*]

DOLLY. I never was so thrilled in my life.

GEORGE. It was perfectly ripping you know. By Jove it was.

TALIAFERRO. That was a magnificent mastery. You have destroyed the things which were destroying you. [*They go on talking to her—she still sits at the piano listening to them with childlike happiness and gratitude.*]

GEORGE [*Going back to* FRANCES *and* WILLIE]. What do you make of it? At first I thought she was lit. And now I don't know whether she is or not.

WILLIE. Certainly not. Certainly *not.* She's not a drinking person.

GEORGE. But that's just the kind that——

DOLLY [*Coming to them—leaving* TALIAFERRO *bending over* MINNIE]. Did you ever see anything so thrilling in your life? Who is she, Bill? *What* is she?

WILLIE [*His fear giving way to pride*]. Did you enjoy it?

DOLLY. Tollie thinks he has performed a miracle of course.

GEORGE. *Some*body did. Something happened somewhere.

FRANCES. Oh, *I* see! William did it this way as a surprise for us. It was so clever of you to have made us think she was a failure at first. It makes her seem so much better now. Doesn't it? What?

DOLLY [*Looking at* WILLIE]. Is that it? Who *is* she?

WILLIE. You—you must guess.

TALIAFERRO. She's going to play again.

MINNIE [*Radiantly*]. What shall I play?

GEORGE [*Who has had enough to drink by this time to free his soul somewhat*]. Play something for *me*. Play my kind of music. Do you know this? [*He plays a few bars.* MINNIE *catches the air and goes on with it.* GEORGE *sings—getting courage as he goes*—DOLLY *urges him on, singing the refrain with him until he and everyone in the room, except* FRANCES, *have let go with complete abandon.*

EXPRESS YO'SE'F MY CHILE

When I was a chile, my mammy say
"Hush yo' mouf—go 'long an' play
Don' you fuss nor fret nor cry—
You can be good ef you des try.
*Sup*press yo'se'f my chile.'—*Sup*press yo'se'f."

But now dey say to a li'l chile
"Laf and holler, sing an' cry.
What you don' wan' do don' eben try.
When you feel like yellin'—yell like hell—
*Ex*press yo'se'f an' do it well:
*Ex*press yo'se'f my chile.—*Ex*press yo'se'f."

When I wus young an' growin' tall
Dey say "You a chile—you don't know all.
You gotta wait an' listen an' grow.
You too young an' in'cent to know.
*Sup*press yo'se'f my chile.—*Sup*press yo'se'f."

Now dey say to a gal right out—
"Speak up plain what you t'inkin' bout.
What you feelin' let fo'kes know.
Don' hide nothin' an' say 'taint so.
*Ex*press yo'se'f my chile.—*Ex*press yo'se'f."

"Let all yo' emotions rise to de top.
Ef you got convolutions don't let 'em stop."
Dat's what dey say to a gal now-days.
Express yo'se'f is de latest craze.
*Ex*press yo'se'f my chile.—*Ex*press yo'se'f."

(The words of this song have been copyrighted in the name of RACHEL CROTHERS.)

[*George seizes* MINNIE'S *hand and* DOLLY'S—DOLLY *takes* TALIAFERRO'S—TALIAFERRO *takes* FRANCES'S. *They dance in a circle around* WILLIE—*laughing and singing "Express Yo'se'f my Chile," dragging* FRANCES *with them.* WILLIE *doesn't know whether to laugh or cry.*]

FRANCES [*Breaking away as* GEORGE *finishes with a whoop*]. Stop! It hurts me.

GEORGE. Let us be happy. [*He begins a faun like dance by himself.*] Let us be free! Who's afraid of the truth? Not me! Not me! [*They all shout with laughter except* FRANCES.]

DOLLY. Didn't I tell you George is a great man? If you only would release your soul, Georgie! So other people could see the greatness coming out!

FRANCES. I rather think this has gone too far.

TALIAFERRO. On the contrary we haven't gone far enough. We've had a moment of exaltation—when we felt the touch of strange wings—but we don't keep it. We let it go.

MINNIE. But *can't* we? Can't we keep it?

TALIAFERRO. *Ah!*—when we have learned to do *that*—we have learned all things. If you can *keep* the thing that made you play—you are a great artist.

MINNIE. It isn't the *playing* that matters so much, is it? But finding the thing that made me do it.

TALIAFERRO. Quite so. *Quite so.*

MINNIE. Oh Willie—you haven't found it, have you?

WILLIE [*Very nervously*]. What do you mean?

MINNIE. That innermost power.

WILLIE. Never mind now. You're excited.

MINNIE. But you're doing yourself a great wrong. You aren't letting them see what you really are.

WILLIE. Don't say any more now.

MINNIE [*Shaken with a great emotional excitement which she tries to control*]. Can't you see that they don't *know* you? That you're hiding yourself and letting them think——

WILLIE. Don't—*please.*

MINNIE. Then I'll go. I can't stay and not say it. I don't want to be shut up again. It's too wonderful to be free just for a little while. [*She smiles back at them wistfully as she goes off.*]

DOLLY [*After a pause*]. Am I mad—or is she?

TALIAFERRO. We're still children playing with a great fire.

FRANCES. What did she mean?

DOLLY *and* GEORGE [*Singing softly*]. "Express you'se'f my chil'. Express you'se'f."

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

SCENE II

TIME: *Immediately following Scene I.*

PLACE: WILLIE'S *bedroom. This room also shows the hand of the decorator. It is empty and correct. The bed being the main feature—large and important —on a dais.* WILLIE, *still in his evening clothes, comes quickly in from the hall. He lights a cigarette and begins walking about nervously. There is a knock at the hall door.*

WILLIE. Come.—My God!

[MINNIE *rushes in quickly. She wears a very wholesome blue dressing gown. Her hair is in a braid and tied with a blue ribbon. There is about her a childlike abandon.*]

MINNIE. Oh Willie—Willie—I can't keep still any longer.

WILLIE. What are you doing here? Go back! Go *back!*

MINNIE. I've *got* to talk to you. You're in danger and you don't know it.

WILLIE. You can't do this. Go back to your room.

MINNIE. You've got to hear the *truth.* You must listen to it.

WILLIE. What's the matter with you? You're excited. These people have stirred you up till you don't know what you're saying.

MINNIE. Oh yes, I do.

WILLIE. No you don't. Everything you did and said downstairs was pure excitement. Now you go and get into bed and cover up and——

MINNIE. But Willie I want to help you. You need it just as much as I did. You don't see. You don't *see* your danger. You're hiding your real self. You're not letting these people know what you are at all.

WILLIE. Never mind that. I tell you you can't stay here. Come on, now, and get to—— [*Trying to get her to the door.*]

MINNIE. Wait—*please!* Don't try to fight the truth, Willie. It's in yourself. Let it come out.

WILLIE. Nonsense, Minnie! You're flighty. I told you you wouldn't understand anything they said.

MINNIE. But I *do.* I understand it better than anything I ever heard in my life. They've opened the door for me. *I'm* reborn too. Don't you see? They've given *me* wings and flight and space too.

WILLIE. Stop it! *Stop* it, I say. It's upset you. You've lost your head.

MINNIE. I've just *found* myself. You told me they were something beyond—and different, but I didn't know how marvelous they are. That wonderful man the artist, has made me *free*, Willie—*free!*

WILLIE. Now you be careful. It's dangerous stuff to monkey with I tell you. *I* understand it. *I* know where to draw the line—but you let it alone. It's not good for you.

MINNIE. Didn't you hear me play?

WILLIE. Yes I did.

MINNIE. Didn't you see that all I've wanted to be —and all I've wanted to *do*—came out because—*at last*—I wasn't afraid? Didn't you hear it?

WILLIE. I did—and I was darned proud of you, too. There was something in your music I didn't know you had. The excitement loosened you up. It was *fine*. Now you go to bed and tomorrow we'll——

MINNIE. But it isn't the playing that matters. That's only one little part of it. It's what I can say to *you*—now. I'm not afraid to say things that there isn't anyone else *to* say—and things that—that your life and your happiness and your—your *everything* depend on.

WILLIE. All right—all right—wait till morning and say them. You can get the whole business out of your system then.

MINNIE [*Desperately*]. They *can't* wait.

WILLIE. Now—now—you're getting excited again. If you don't go back to your room, I'll call Mother.

MINNIE. It's *got* to be said before you see these people again—before you see Mrs. Sylvester. Oh, Willie, she's so beautiful and wonderful! Don't lose her.

WILLIE. *Lose* her? What do you mean?

MINNIE. You'll never hold her unless you give her more than she's ever had before.

WILLIE. Of course I can give her more than she's ever *dreamed*——

MINNIE. Oh, I don't mean that. *That* won't hold her. It must be *yourself*, and it must be a bigger self than she knows you have.

WILLIE. What?

MINNIE. She'll get tired of *pretending* that you are a great man.

WILLIE. *What?*

MINNIE. You must show her that you really *are* one.

WILLIE. What do you mean?

MINNIE. Why don't you let her *see* what you are? Why don't you show her yourself—your true—your *naked self?*

WILLIE [*Jumping*]. For the Lord's sake! Some one will hear you!

MINNIE. Then you *would* be great. Then she *would* love you and respect you.

WILLIE. You're on the wrong track, Minnie, and all mixed up.

MINNIE [*Not paying any attention to his protests*]. Oh, I know so well why you want to be like them. You've wanted beauty all your life—and style and—and what they have. But you're trying to get it the wrong way. You're a *sham* now, Willie.

WILLIE. I am not. I am *not.*

MINNIE. And they know it. Everybody knows it, but you.

WILLIE. Ho—*I* know what they think of me. I know. They think I'm a big person—*all* of them.

MINNIE. They're making a fool of you. [*Stamping her foot at him.*]

WILLIE. You can't say that to me!

MINNIE. Yes, I can—and this is *why* I can say it. [*She sits on the side of* WILLIE's *bed in complete unconsciousness but much to his amazed discomfort.*] When I did that awful thing—when I failed and fell

down and humiliated you—I thought I could never live and face you again. I came upstairs and said "If there *is* anything in us that has any power—come out and save me *now!*" And it *did*, Willie. It did. Something deep, deep, deep down came out and spoke to me—and told me the truth. It told me that everything that has ever happened to me is my own fault because I've been a coward all my life—a weak, miserable, little coward—afraid to live—afraid to give what I had to give. No wonder you got tired of me. It was my fault—not yours.

WILLIE. Oh now—Minnie——

MINNIE. I never let even you see the things I should have shown to you because I was afraid. And that's what you're doing now—you're hiding your best self because you're afraid it isn't what she wants.

WILLIE. I know you mean well—but you don't understand. Now you can't stay here a minute longer, I tell you, and I mean it. You—[*Hustling her toward the door*].

MINNIE. Willie, this isn't *me* talking—not the outside everyday me. I may never have the courage to say this again. I know better than—than anyone else in the world how fine and sweet you are. I know how you tried not to hurt me when you told me you just *had* to go away—out—into another world.

WILLIE. That's damned nice of you, Minnie.

MINNIE. And now that you've almost got what you've always wanted, I don't want you to lose it.

WILLIE. Thank you for—that.

MINNIE. And don't you see you can hold her forever if you give her the *great* things?

WILLIE. *What* things?

MINNIE. The things that are in your soul.

WILLIE. I'm not so sure she cares so much about my soul.

MINNIE. That's just what she's reaching for—groping for—trying to understand. You heard her say—"If we only weren't afraid of the *truth*—if we only knew our own power what God-like creatures we could be!" She——

[*There is a low knock at the hall door. They stop—startled.* MINNIE *is about to speak.* WILLIE *hushes her in frantic pantomime and pushes her into a shallow clothes-closet at the Right and locks the door. The knock is repeated.*]

WILLIE [*Trying to be cheerful and careless*]. Come. [*Another knock.*] Come in. Oh come *in.*

FRANCES [*Opening the door slowly*]. May I—just for a moment? [WILLIE *is too appalled to speak.*] I came to beg a cigarette—one of those delicious ones you gave me out of your own case. [*She comes into the room—leaving the door open—very exotic in her negligee—her bare feet in sandals.*]

WILLIE [*Very nervous about the open door*]. A—a——

FRANCES. Oh, the door. Do you want it shut? There! [*She closes it and leans back on it.*] It *is* cosier—Isn't it? *Oh*—aren't our personal rooms interesting! And how they do express us! This is absolutely *you*—strong and austere.

WILLIE. A—think so?

FRANCES. And the cigarette? They've quite spoiled me for anything else.

WILLIE. Oh—yes. Here they are. So glad you like them. [*Getting the case from his pocket.*] Take them. A—just take the case along with you.

FRANCES [*Laughing*]. Oh no. If I took them *all* and ran away it would spoil the *flavor* of just *this* one. There—thank you. [*Selecting one very daintily and putting the case back in* WILLIE'*s hand.*] And now—a light?

WILLIE. Oh—yes—I beg your pardon. [*He finds matches and lights one after several tries—fumbling with trembling fingers.*]

FRANCES. Thanks. [*She takes a long breath and blows the smoke playfully in* WILLIE'S *face. He coughs. She sinks luxuriously into the large chair.*] Oh what bliss! This is a *real* moment. Isn't it? Away from the stupid treadmill. You're so genuine yourself—it gives me a mad passion to obey *all* my impulses. I'm *trying* to get beyond petty hypocrisies and conventions—but it's awfully hard for a woman to be really free, isn't it? A man never knows quite how hard it is. There are such eons and eons of old prejudices, and ridiculous "don'ts" to live down—aren't there? But you do *so* understand. I knew if we were alone like this, it would help me. You know why I wanted to do it—to make us look into each other's eyes as two absolutely free—*equal* human beings—not as man and woman at all. Of course, I don't believe that sex *is* the basis of all things. Not at all—at all—*at all.* I believe the spiritual is the fountain—the source of life. [*Putting two fingers seductively on his wrist.*] That's why there *can* be this beautiful freedom between us.—Well—now *you* talk to

me. Say something new and revealing that I've never heard before.

WILLIE [*In an agony of embarrassment, but trying to live up to the situation*]. Well—I—I'm afraid you've heard everything there is to say.

FRANCES. No—not quite. Sit here—close—so nothing breaks the current of sympathy. [*Making him sit on the cushion at her feet.*] You were going to really talk when we were interrupted. I couldn't go to sleep without coming to ask you what it was. Shy deep natures like yours so seldom do express themselves. The language of the soul is as illusive—as intangible as *that.* [*Blowing a ring of smoke and pointing to it.*] If it isn't caught in the first magic moment it never tries again. That's why I came straight to you—for fear you'd think I didn't want to listen. I wouldn't have you think I'd closed the door to you for anything in the world. You said you wanted something. There's an unsatisfied longing in your eyes. What is it? Tell me.

WILLIE. A—I——

FRANCES. Oh don't be inhibited with *me.* Have you grown timid again?

WILLIE. Oh no. Oh no.

FRANCES. There *was* perfect harmony between us —till that strange woman came into the room. Then I felt a discord—something subtle and vague but very strong. Who is she? *What* is she? Why is she here with you now?

WILLIE. What? [*With a nervous glance towards the closet door.*]

FRANCES. I seemed to get something out of the

past—some link between you and her. Don't be afraid of hurting me. Tell me—whatever it is. I shall understand.

WILLIE. Well—a—I don't think I have anything in particular to say. That is—not just now.

FRANCES. Oh—Was I mistaken? I thought there was a sympathy between us—rare and exquisite.

WILLIE. There was. There *is*. Some other time I can talk better.

FRANCES. Did you mean what you said—or were you only being like other men?

WILLIE. I can't say—just now—what I meant. There's a good reason. A—I'll explain tomorrow.

FRANCES. I'm afraid there won't be a tomorrow. You *are* only a man—after all.

MINNIE [*Pounding on the door*]. Let me out, Willie. [*A pause. She rattles the knob.*] Let me out so you can tell her the truth. [*They rise and stand petrified for a moment.*] Let me out, Willie!

FRANCES. Oh! [*She rushes to the hall door in ignominious terror.*]

WILLIE [*Running after her and stopping her as she tries to open the door*]. Wait! Wait, I say. Don't you go!

FRANCES. That woman's there! How dare you let *me* come into this room!

WILLIE. Now wait!—You—I—She——

MINNIE [*Pounding on the door*]. Open the door, Willie!

[FRANCES *tries to get out the hall door.*]

WILLIE [*Keeping his hand on the door knob*]. Don't

you leave this room! You can't go 'till you understand.

FRANCES. What?

WILLIE. It isn't like it looks at all.

MINNIE. Why don't you let me out, Willie?

WILLIE. She knows you're here. You'd better stay or it will look queer.

FRANCES [*As majestically as possible*]. How dare you say that to me!

MINNIE. Open the door, Willie, so I can go away.

FRANCES [*Deciding to stay and bluff it out*]. Yes! Open it.

WILLIE. But you don't think——

FRANCES. *Open it!*

WILLIE [*Hurrying over to unlock the closet door*]. Now don't you go.

MINNIE [*Throwing the door open and coming out*]. *I'm* the reason he couldn't speak. *I* came on an impulse too, just as you did. But I'll go, and it will be as though it had never happened. [*She starts for the door.*]

WILLIE. Wait, Minnie. [*To* FRANCES.] You don't think——

FRANCES. How *dare* you let her come into this house with me and my friends!

MINNIE. Oh he didn't know I was going to do this. I came to tell him something so important it couldn't wait till morning, and when you knocked I did the stupid old thing of hiding. It always makes everything wrong to hide something doesn't it? I ought to have stood still right here and then you would have understood.

FRANCES. Don't let her speak to me! [*She starts to the door.*]

WILLIE. Wait! She didn't hide. I *put* her in there. It was a damned silly thing to do. I'm not used to women doing these things anyway. But she—It's all as straight as a string.

FRANCES. It's all loathsome and hideous!

MINNIE. Oh no—no—no—it *isn't!* You couldn't think anything wrong of Willie.

FRANCES [*To* WILLIE]. I might have *known* how common you are.

MINNIE. Oh, don't say that. He didn't know I was coming. He didn't even want me to stay. Let me tell you just exactly why I——

FRANCES. Don't speak to me. Don't *dare* to speak to me. [*To* WILLIE.] I ought to have known better than to come into this house. I shall leave as early as possible in the morning. [*She sweeps out. They stare at the open door.*]

MINNIE [*After a pause of amazement*]. She only said that because she's hurt and angry.

WILLIE. Common! She said I was common.

MINNIE. She didn't mean it. She was angry and jealous because somebody else was here. That's natural.

WILLIE. She said she ought not to have come into this house.

MINNIE. It's all my fault. I'll go and *make* her understand.

WILLIE [*Closing the door quickly*]. No you won't. You let it alone. The more you say the worse you make it.

MINNIE. But she's *got* to believe me.

WILLIE. How can you expect her to believe *you* any more than she expects you to believe *her?*

MINNIE. What?

WILLIE. She thinks you came for the same reason she did.

MINNIE. I did.

WILLIE. What?

MINNIE. She came to find your true self.

WILLIE. Oh fiddle-de-dee! She came to *get* me! By hook or by crook—she came to *get* me.

MINNIE. Willie, that's *base.*

WILLIE. Is it?

MINNIE. I heard every word she said. It was beautiful.

WILLIE. Lord, Minnie, don't you know *anything?* Nothing *any* of them said is what you think it is.

MINNIE. Oh!

WILLIE. Their wings and flight mean ego—ego—ego. They're expressing themselves all right and nothing *but* themselves—and living for themselves and getting what they want for themselves. The whole game is self.

MINNIE. You don't mean that.

WILLIE. She said she ought not to have come into this house. She'll be glad to get back into it. She'll *beg* to come back.

MINNIE. You're angry and petty now because she's hurt your *vanity.*

WILLIE. Taliaferro isn't sure he'll paint my picture in this house. He'll paint it where I *want* it painted.

MINNIE. Oh *don't!*

WILLIE. You think I'm only a cheap imitation of them. If I am they *need* me. If they've got what I want I've got what *they* want and they'll come to me and eat the dust to get it.

MINNIE. You're falling down, Willie. You're falling down. Pick yourself up again. Be big and go to her. You never needed to be so big in your life as you do this minute.

WILLIE. I don't give a damn whether I'm big or little.

MINNIE. This is twice I've humiliated you and disgraced you. It can't be. I'm going to get at her.

WILLIE. No you won't. [*They both speak at the same time—their voices rising together in excitement.*]

MINNIE. I'm going to *make* her believe me. I'm going to tell her everything.

WILLIE. Nothing on earth could make her believe you. She'll insult you again. I won't have it.

MINNIE [*Opening the door*]. You're not going to lose her because of anything I've done. That's too horrible. She sha'n't go out of this house. She *sha'n't*. I won't *let* her. [*Suddenly going back to him.*] Oh, Willie, you *are* a great man—you *are*—you've *got* to be. *Show* them you are. They don't appreciate you. Even your mother doesn't. They think your house is too big for you. You show them you're bigger than your house and more powerful than your money. There *is* greatness in you. *Get it out!* [*She shakes him vigorously by the shoulders and hurries out.*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

ACT III

Same as Act I.

TIME: *8 O'clock the following morning.*

REYNOLDS *is drawing back the curtains at the windows at Right and another footman at the Left. The* SECOND FOOTMAN *then goes up the steps and off center.*

After a moment MINNIE *comes into the hall wearing a simple sport frock and sweater. She stops to look back and listen, then comes down into the room.*

MINNIE [*With eager excitement*]. Mrs. Sylvester hasn't come down yet—has she?

REYNOLDS [*Turning with surprise*]. I beg pardon Miss?

MINNIE [*Going down into the room*]. Has a lady—A lady hasn't come down and gone away in a motor, has she?

REYNOLDS. No, Miss—but a car is waiting for someone.

MINNIE. Oh, that's all right.

REYNOLDS. Can I do anything for you, Miss?

MINNIE. No, thank you. [REYNOLDS *starts to the entrance as the* SECOND FOOTMAN *comes back from center entrance and* SIMPSON *from the right. The three men stop as* MINNIE *speaks.*] Oh— Are you the one who took both my notes to her?

REYNOLDS. Yes, Miss.

MINNIE. There're so many of you I didn't rec-

ognize you. She wouldn't go out any other way, would she?

REYNOLDS. Oh no, Miss. She's sure to come this way.

[*The* SECOND FOOTMAN *has smiled and* SIMPSON *has reproved him with a slight cough and a severe look and dismissed him with a nod. He goes off at left,* SIMPSON *at center.* REYNOLDS *goes up the steps* just as JEAN, *the maid to* FRANCES, *enters quickly from the left. She wears a neat black suit and small hat and carries a jewel case.*]

REYNOLDS. Is Madam coming down now?

JEAN. Yes.

REYNOLDS. Someone would like to speak to her.

JEAN. Madame will not wish to be stopped. [*She goes on out center with the intention of being very haughty.*]

FRANCES [*Coming into view in the hall dressed as in Act 1 and drawing on a pair of long gloves*]. You may send up for my luggage now and give this note to Mr. Smith. You understand? Give it to him *yourself.*

REYNOLDS [*Taking the note*]. Very good, madam. Someone would like to speak to you.

MINNIE [*Moving toward them*]. I've been waiting to——

FRANCES [*Quickly*]. Put this in the car. [*Giving her veil to the servant. He goes off with the veil.*]

MINNIE. I've been waiting to see you ever since——

FRANCES. Be careful. Why do you *persist* in trying to see me?

MINNIE. I must. I want to tell you——

FRANCES. I don't want to hear anything you have to say.

MINNIE. But you *sha'n't* go away thinking what you do. Let me tell you the truth about it all—everything—every way.

FRANCES. I shall see Mr. Smith in town. *He* will tell me the truth about it all.

MINNIE. But you mustn't blame *him* for anything. He had nothing to do with it whatever.

FRANCES. I can believe that. It's very obvious you have thrust yourself upon him. You tried to compromise him—*here*—before us all. I'm sure Mr. Smith is quite, *quite* guiltless—but I can't stay in the same house with you. I'm going without saying anything to anyone—to avoid a scene and a scandal. If my friends knew, they'd leave at once.

MINNIE. Then I must make them understand.

FRANCES. What?

MINNIE. I'll tell *them* what I did.

FRANCES. You won't.

MINNIE. Of course I will.

FRANCES. You *can't!* It would ruin you.

MINNIE. But I——

FRANCES. Don't say one word. Can't you see I'm protecting you by keeping still? No matter why you were there—for any reason on earth—you can't tell it. You can't tell you were *hidden* in his room. If you're stupid enough to try to get out of this by talking you'll damn yourself. If you——

DOLLY [*Coming down the steps followed by* GEORGE *and* TALLAFERRO. *They are all three in riding clothes.*] Oh, look who's here! Morning. Morning,

Minnie. I dreamed about you last night. So did George. What in the name of all that's holy are you doing down here in your hat at this ungodly hour, Frances?

Taliaferro. Good morning. How is the genius this morning? I thought we were the only ones up to greet the sun.

George. I bet you were never up so early in your life to greet anything, Frances. What's doing?

Dolly. George is trying to act as though he's up because he wants to be. Taliaferro is only riding because it gives him an excuse to wear those clothes. Isn't he the glass of fashion?

George. In a molded form?

Dolly [*Giggling*]. Georgie, you *are* witty—if you'd just let yourself go.

Taliaferro. But, for God's sake, *don't*, Georgie, I beg of you.

Dolly. Everybody seems to be up and doing brave things but our host. Where is he?

George [*Looking at* Frances *as she pulls nervously at her gloves*]. Are you putting on your gloves to meet him, Frances?

Taliaferro. Do I smell a rendezvous?

Dolly. An *elopement!*

Frances. Don't be silly. I'm rushing back to town with a wretched toothache.

Dolly. What a beastly shame! What's the matter with you, Minnie? You look as if you had a heartache.

Minnie [*Who has been waiting tensely for a chance to speak*]. I want to——

FRANCES. *No.*

DOLLY. What's the matter?

MINNIE. I want to tell you something I did last night.

FRANCES. She thinks she ought to and it isn't necessary, Mr. Smith and I know. That's quite enough.

DOLLY. It isn't quite enough till *I* know. What is it, Minnie? Tell it. It's sure to be thrilling. I dreamed you were going to play before all the great old masters and just as Mozart waved his hand for you to go to the piano—just like that—you started and stopped—and I was crossing my fingers and pushing you so hard I kicked George out of bed. That's why he's up now.

GEORGE. Shut up, Dolly. If you only would, you know, she might say something.

MINNIE. Last night I——

FRANCES. You *can't*.

DOLLY. Why does it mean so much in your life, Frances?

FRANCES. I'm trying to make her keep still for her own sake, of course.

MINNIE. But I *want* to tell them.

DOLLY. Then for goodness sake, do.

MINNIE. Last night I——

FRANCES. It's impossible. Don't you know Mr. Smith will be very angry?

DOLLY. Heavens, is it anything serious?

TALIAFERRO. Why shouldn't she tell it if she wants to?

GEORGE. Very dangerous to suppress your desires, you know.

TALIAFERRO. Don't check the thing which carried you to those heights last night. I can't imagine you doing anything now that hasn't a spark of inspiration in it—touched by the breath of the gods.

MRS. SMITH [*Who has come into the entrance in time to hear* TALIAFERRO]. I gathered from my son he was entertaining nothing less than gods and goddesses. That's why I hesitated to come down. Good morning.

DOLLY [*After they have all said good morning*]. But we knew you were there. We felt you in the background. A great man always has a great mother.

MRS. SMITH [*Coming down the steps*]. You don't have to say that kind of thing to *me* in order to make conversation.

DOLLY. But I love saying it. It's my spontaneous reaction to you.

GEORGE. Shut up, Dolly. [*Going to* MRS. SMITH *to shake hands.*] How do you do, Mrs. Smith. I'm George Cadwalader.

DOLLY. In other words my husband, and that is the infamous Taliaferro who is going to paint your son's portrait—or rather his soul.

MRS. SMITH. Have you persuaded *yourself* you can do that or only other people? [*Smiling drily at* TALIAFERRO.]

TALIAFERRO. Don't *you* think it can be done?

MRS. SMITH. No—I think even Willie may have a

little something in him which can't be seen with the naked eye.

TALIAFERRO. Ah—that's just it. I paint with a brush which is dipped in an inner vision. Wait till you see the portrait. Your son will be revealed to you.

MRS. SMITH. I hope it will reveal him to himself. Just at present I don't think he knows whether he's God—or a tadpole.

TALIAFERRO [*Laughing*]. The process of finding oneself always goes through confusion before it reaches harmony—doesn't it?

MRS. SMITH. Oh it does? Well he's been trying to confuse *me*, too. Trying to make me believe that just because somebody *wants* to do a thing it *ought* to be done.

TALIAFERRO. Don't you agree with that? Don't you believe in absolute individual freedom?

MRS. SMITH. It depends on the individual how much I believe in it. [*Turning her dry shrewd look at Frances.*]

FRANCES. Isn't someone going to introduce me? I'm Frances Sylvester.

MRS. SMITH. Yes, I recognize you.

FRANCES. Oh, have we seen each other before?

MRS. SMITH. I don't think you've seen *me*. I understand *you* are a great disciple of freedom.

FRANCES. Oh yes, I think it's the most important thing in the world—the complete and utter expression of oneself. I'm so sorry to have to hurry off now that you *are* down. I wanted to slip away without disturbing anyone. I thought no one would be down so early.

MRS. SMITH. I'm an early riser and a poor sleeper

myself. Last night I was *unusually* wide awake.

FRANCES [*Slightly startled*]. Oh—really?

MRS. SMITH. That's why I went in to see Willie so early this morning—to see how he could explain some of the—*freedom*—I seemed to feel in the air last night.

FRANCES. And *did* he? [*Looking very steadily back at* MRS. SMITH.]

MRS. SMITH. He did a good deal of talking—but he didn't explain much.

TALIAFERRO. If you felt something strange in the air last night, dear lady, you evidently got a vibration. Quite simple. Merely thought transference. A very remarkable thing happened here in this room. You must have felt something lifted—released.

MRS. SMITH. I certainly felt something *let loose.*

DOLLY. How frightfully interesting! You must have got George's vibration. It's colossal.

MRS. SMITH. A very remarkable thing happened in another room—too, last night. [*Looking at Frances.*]

FRANCES [*Beginning to be very uncomfortable but keeping her poise*]. You must be a bit of a mystic. You seem to be very psychic—so sensitive to conditions.

MRS. SMITH. I have very good hearing and eyesight—if that's what you mean.

DOLLY. What *are* they talking about?

MRS. SMITH. Oh—don't you know? I thought you *told* everything you do. Willie said openness was the point.

DOLLY. *Frances*, have you done something you don't want us to know?

MINNIE. Oh no, she hasn't. I can explain. Don't misjudge Mrs. Sylvester, Mrs. Smith.

FRANCES. I'm not in the habit of having what I do explained or judged or *misjudged.*

MRS. SMITH [*With a flash of anger which until now she has been able to control under her sarcasm*]. And I'm not in the habit of *any* of it. It *all* has to be explained to me.

MINNIE. But I was there all the time, Mrs. Smith. I went first.

MRS. SMITH. *What?*

MINNIE. I went to Willie's room to tell him something.

DOLLY. Oh!

MRS. SMITH. Minnie Whitcomb! Are you a plumb fool? What in the name of common sense did you do *that* for? [*Her righteous anger blazing at* MINNIE.]

MINNIE. I had to tell him something.

MRS. SMITH. There are twenty-two other rooms in the house. I s'pose you couldn't wait till morning and tell him in one of them.

MINNIE. No I couldn't. I *couldn't* wait till morning.

MRS. SMITH. You certainly were bitten with the new doctrine. It didn't take *you* long to release yourself.

MINNIE. It's the most important thing in the world to him. I had to tell him before he saw anyone else. While I was there—there was a knock at the door.

DOLLY. Oh! it's perfect!

MINNIE. We didn't know just what to do, so Willie put me in a cupboard and locked the door.

[*A shriek of laugher from* DOLLY, GEORGE *and* TALIAFERRO.]

FRANCES. I really don't know why we should hear this.

MINNIE. And then the other door opened and Mrs. Sylvester came in.

[*They stop laughing to look at* FRANCES.]

DOLLY. *What?* [*They laugh again.*] It's too good to be true! She's making it up.

TALIAFERRO [*Choking with laughter*]. And then what happened?

MRS. SMITH. Go on. Be open and frank and *free*, as Willie says.

GEORGE. Frances, what did *you* have to tell him that couldn't wait till morning?

[*Laughing so he can scarcely speak.*]

FRANCES. This is disgusting. I won't be discussed and criticized by vulgar narrow-minded ideas of convention.

DOLLY. Of course not, dear. What did you do it for—a joke?

MINNIE. Oh, no. It wasn't a joke. I could hear every word they said.

DOLLY. Oh!

[*They shout again.*]

MINNIE. Don't laugh, please. She came to——

TALIAFERRO. To what?

MINNIE. To help Willie express himself.

[*A still louder shriek of laughter.*]

GEORGE. Oh my God! And *did* he?

MINNIE. He couldn't because I was there. So I pounded on the door and told him to let me out.

DOLLY. *Never!* I can believe *anything* but that.

TALIAFERRO. You told him to let out the truth.

[*They are breathless and gasping.*]

MINNIE. *Stop laughing!* Mrs. Sylvester was angry. She didn't believe I was there for a good reason. [*To* MRS. SYLVESTER.] You said you felt something out of the past between Willie and me. There *was* something. When we were very young we were going to be married—but we weren't right for each other. He went away and I've never even seen him until now—when they asked me to come—just because they were kind. [WILLIE *comes into the entrance. No one sees him.*] I knew the moment I saw you, you were what he'd wanted all his life—but I knew you didn't appreciate him. He's big. He's wonderful. Oh he *is!* I told him he was throwing away his happiness by not letting you see how—how good he is. What if I did do it the wrong way? Why can't you believe me? [*Turning to the others.*] Can't you make her see it *couldn't* be what she thinks? [*To* FRANCES *again.*] Why *can't* you believe me? How can you help it? Why doesn't the truth in *you* see the truth in me? [*She sees* WILLIE.] Oh Willie—don't let her go. Try to make her stay. [*She rushes out to hide the tears which are beginning to get beyond her control. There is a quick response of sympathy from* DOLLY, GEORGE *and* TALIAFERRO, *trying to hold her back.* MRS. SMITH *furtively wipes a tear from her cheek.*]

DOLLY. She's a *darling!* She's a *lamb!*

WILLIE [*Coming down the steps and speaking with a very quiet firmness*]. This is a pretty good time to

put ourselves to the test—isn't it? To see if we know the truth when we hear it?

DOLLY. Oh, Bill, dear, don't worry. *We* believe in fairies.

TALIAFERRO [*Quite simply and with sincere feeling*]. And do we believe in the greatest of all things? Do we know when *that* has been in our midst?

FRANCES. I believe in *William*. Anger swept me away for a moment but that's gone. My higher nature has——

REYNOLDS [*Coming into the entrance*]. Pardon me, Madam. Your luggage is in the car.

FRANCES. Take it out again. [*With a magnificent gesture.*]

REYNOLDS. Very good, Madam. [*He goes out.*]

FRANCES. *I* understand why she did it, as no one else possibly can. It hurts me to see the rest of you so horribly material. It shows me you might even misinterpret what *I* did. [*She goes up the steps.*] I'm going back to my room now, William—but I shall want to see you in a *very* little while. [*She goes out.*]

DOLLY. Isn't she priceless! You've made a great conquest, Bill. I s'pose congratulations are in order. Let me be the first to kiss you. [*Going to* WILLIE *and kissing his embarrassed cheek*]. It's too gorgeous. So nice for George and me too. We're so fond of *both of you*. Usually we're awfully glad for one side and terribly sorry for the other. Come on fellows. Let's get started. [*Going up the steps and turning to* MRS. SMITH.] I congratulate *you*, Mrs. Smith on your daughter-in-law. She'll be so especially congenial to *you*.

Mrs. Smith [*After a slight pause*]. Shall I express *myself* now—Willie?

Dolly. Oh do.

Willie. I think it's about time for *me* to speak a little truth.

Dolly. Oh, we know how you feel, Bill. We've all been in love.

George. It's tough while it lasts. Come on, Tollie.

Willie. Wait a minute please. You've taken too much for granted. It isn't at all what you——

Dolly. It'll be all right, Bill. Keep your nerve.

Taliaferro. We know she *seems* the unattainable—above and beyond all other women. But she isn't.

Mrs. Smith. One of the *overtones.* I begin to see what that means now.

Dolly. Exactly. You won't judge her by the ordinary rules for ordinary mortals—will you, Mrs. Smith? Frances is living on too high a plane for that.

Mrs. Smith. It don't make much difference to me *what* she's living on—so long as Willie's pleased. He thinks she's a little too transcendental to be alive at all. Don't you Willie? [Willie *has turned away into the window irritated and baffled.*] Willie—you deaf?

Willie. No. I'm listening. I get you.

Mrs. Smith. Too bad Minnie blundered in and upset things a little. She's a simple thing.

Taliaferro. She intrigues me peculiarly. I'm going to stay and talk to her about her future.

Dolly. Oh not now.

TALIAFERRO. Yes now. Go on. I'm not coming. I may pick you up later.

DOLLY. You're a wretch. Come on, George. I 'spose I'll have to let you have the best horse.

GEORGE. By all means, darling. Why not?

[GEORGE *and* DOLLY *go.*]

TALIAFERRO. I have a strong sense of responsibility for her.

WILLIE [*A little aggressively*]. What do you mean by that?

TALIAFERRO. I have awakened her—roused her to a realization of her own power and what life may have for her if she will take it.

MRS. SMITH. Is he talking about *Minnie*, Willie?

WILLIE [*Not listening to his mother*]. Excuse me, but I don't know why you should feel *that*.

TALIAFERRO. Ah—don't you? And if you don't —why then you don't. I can't explain it.

WILLIE. You don't have to *explain* anything to *me* about Miss Whitcomb.

MRS. SMITH. Lord no! She's just one of those unfortunate women that's got nothing in 'em *to* explain.

TALIAFERRO. I presume you realize she has the potentialities of a great musician?

WILLIE. I'd much rather not discuss Miss Whitcomb's *potentialities* with anyone but herself.

MRS. SMITH. Why not, Willie? If the gentleman could do anything to help Minnie, it would be good. She's been helping *other* people to make music all her life.

TALIAFERRO. That's why her own pent-up song has gushed forth with such power.

MRS. SMITH. What?

WILLIE. You didn't hear her play last night, mother. My guests were astounded. They began to realize that a very extraordinary person is in the house.

MRS. SMITH. You don't mean *Minnie!*

TALIAFERRO. All she is—her soul, her mind—her sex—her love—have gone into that silent music. Something has happened to her sometime to make her think she could only stand by and look on at life.

MRS. SMITH [*Watching* WILLIE *out of the corner of her eye*]. What do you s'pose that could be, Willie? I've known her since she was a baby. Don't upset her with foolish ideas. Willie warned her. He told her she wouldn't understand your language—and you see—she's gone and taken you literally. She's spilled her soul right out on the carpet for you all to step on.

TALIAFERRO. Well—isn't that better than to go on crushing it and suppressing it as completely as she has been doing?

MRS. SMITH. I'm not so sure about that. If we were all running around without any *suppressions*, we might as well have tails again.

TALIAFERRO [*Laughing*]. I don't get a sense of much suppression on your part, dear lady.

MRS. SMITH. You don't! Well I'm suppressing more this minute than most people feel in a life time. If I was to let go now—God help Willie. [*She rises firmly and goes up the steps.*]

TALIAFERRO [*Laughing and following her*]. I think I recognize in you an individuality almost as natural

and untrammelled as my own. We ought to appreciate and understand each other.

MRS. SMITH. You flatter me. I don't even understand my own son. When you've painted that portrait I may be able to see some of these hidden mysteries. I'll tell Minnie to come right down—you want to talk to her. [*She goes up the steps.*]

TALIAFERRO. Yes—do please.

MRS. SMITH. And you keep your eye on her, Willie. You began it. You're responsible. Now that she's cut loose, there's no telling what she may do. Minnie's been bottled up a good many years. When she pops —look out. [*She goes off Left.*]

TALIAFERRO [*Going back to* WILLIE]. By the way —*about* your portrait. I've decided——

WILLIE [*Coming quickly toward* TALIAFERRO, a little *fiercely*]. What are you going to say to her?

TALIAFERRO. Well—I'm not going to make improper advances. At least not just *yet*. I shall paint you sitting because that won't show how short your legs are.

WILLIE. I've decided a few things about that portrait myself. My legs aren't quite so short as you think. What are you going to say to her?

TALIAFERRO. Well really! Is that a challenge? I may talk to a genius about her work and how to bring it before the world. May I not?

WILLIE. I don't know that Miss Whitcomb wants to be put before the world, and if she does *I'll* do it.

TALIAFERRO. But, my dear man, must I remind you that there are things that money can not do?

WILLIE. For instance?

TALIAFERRO. It can't open the doors of the holy of holies. I shall get an audience of musicians of the first rank—in my own studio.

WILLIE. I don't want her playing in *anybody's* studio. Besides an audience of musicians would be the worst thing that could happen to her. They'd tear her limb from limb.

TALIAFERRO. Ah—the artist listens with passionate appreciation—born of his own travail and agony and accomplishment. [MINNIE *comes into the entrance.*] Come in, dear lady. You have moved me profoundly—both your music and yourself. I am at your feet to serve you. [*He puts out both his hands to her. She comes down the steps and gives him her hands. He kisses them.*]

MINNIE. Oh! What does he mean, Willie?

WILLIE. I'm sure I don't know.

TALIAFERRO. You must be heard. You must give your great gift to the world—not bury it.

MINNIE. Do you mean you think I could do something with my music—out in the world?

TALIAFERRO. Isn't it pushing you—compelling you—screaming within you to be let out?

MINNIE. Yes—yes—it is.

WILLIE. I'm sure you mean well, Taliaferro, but you're going too fast. We'll have to weigh and consider it rationally, Minnie, before you decide anything.

MINNIE. Oh, Willie, you don't understand. [*Giving her hands to* TALIAFERRO *again.*] How shall I begin?

TALIAFERRO. You played last night with your soul. It was the supreme effort of your inner being

to make itself articulate. Serious faults and crudities —yes—of course.

WILLIE. Nonsense! I didn't see any faults.

TALIAFERRO [*To* WILLIE]. No—you wouldn't. [*To* MINNIE *again.*] You must get to the great teachers in Europe.

WILLIE. Ho! The great teachers can come over here to her. That's easy.

MINNIE [*Laughing*]. You funny little boy! You don't understand. [*To* TALIAFERRO.] If I had only known you before! So much time has been wasted.

TALIAFERRO [*Kissing her hands again*]. We don't measure life by time—but by living.

WILLIE. Would you like to take a walk or a drive, Minnie? It's a beautiful morning.

TALIAFERRO. A marvelous career lies in these beautiful hands if you are faithful to it.

MINNIE. I haven't anything else to be faithful to.

WILLIE. Now, Minnie!

MINNIE. It's like a miracle to have found you. You've made me alive! *I'm* not afraid *now* to give you all *I* have.

WILLIE. Be careful, Minnie,—you don't realize what you're saying.

TALIAFERRO. She is speaking the language of one artist to another. You don't understand.

WILLIE. Don't worry about what I don't understand. We'll talk about it all—later, Minnie.

TALIAFERRO. Do I get a slight suggestion that you would perhaps like to be alone with the lady? I'll go.

MINNIE. Oh! no! Don't.

TALIAFERRO [*Going up the steps*]. But I'll come back. There's enough for all of us pulling together in a long hard pull to get you where you want to go. Don't let anything destroy your faith in yourself. When your spirit falters, come to me. Let me give you strength out of my infinite belief in you. And above all things don't let the *commonplace* drag you down. Au revoir, dear lady. [*He strides out.*]

MINNIE. Isn't he wonderful?

WILLIE. He's a windbag. I never knew anybody who likes to hear himself talk so well. See here, Minnie, how much does this music business mean to you?

MINNIE. Everything.

WILLIE. Wouldn't you rather be happy as a woman than a successful musician?

MINNIE. This will be more than just happiness. Think of playing to hundreds of people—all at one time—making them hear what I've always heard—feel what I feel! Oh! *God*—how wonderful it will be!

WILLIE. Listen, Minnie. No matter how much of a success you are, you have to have somebody to take care of you.

MINNIE. Oh no. I'm not used to that. It would hamper me. I must be free. When I think of what I'm going to do, my heart pounds so I can't breathe. There's a singing in my veins—a throbbing.

WILLIE. Are you thinking of that man Taliaferro?

MINNIE. All the time.

WILLIE. Take everything he says with a grain of salt. Temperament—guff.

MINNIE. He's an artist. I trust him absolutely.

WILLIE. You can't trust *any* of 'em. They're all loose.

MINNIE [*Smiling at him*]. That will be so good for me. [*Suddenly growing serious.*] Oh, Willie—what if I *am* great—really and truly great? What if I *have* got the divine spark?

WILLIE. I wouldn't count on that. Very few of us have. See here—what ever made you think there was anything great in me?

MINNIE. It began when I was a little girl I 'spose —when we used to play in the barn and you were always the king.

WILLIE. But after I went away—did you—Did you still go on—Did you go on caring a little—in the old way?

MINNIE. Oh yes—I kept you with me. I had to have something. Every evening all these years we've met on the church steps in the same old way—under the clock. You said the things I wanted to hear you say. It was so real that if anyone passed I was proud that you were with me and not ashamed that you had forgotten me. If another woman went by with her husband or her lover or her baby I knew she had something of grief or disappointment in her happiness—while I had only the ideal of it all. Then when we stood up and you walked with me to the gate I went into the little empty house with something that made the next day easier—with places of great shining in it. You were noble and splendid. That's the way you've been to me always and when I came——

WILLIE. You saw I was only a conceited fool.

MINNIE. Yes.

WILLIE. What? You do think that—do you?

MINNIE. You'll get over it—if you're just honest, Willie. If you just tell the truth to yourself.

WILLIE. Well, by golly, the toothpaste is honest. There isn't an ounce of fake in it—and it's *me*—and it's going to get me what I want. If I can't be great you can. I'll advertise you from pole to pole and make you the biggest one of 'em all.

MINNIE [*Laughing*]. You sound like your old self now.

WILLIE. I'm going to take care of you, Minnie.

MINNIE. Oh, you don't need to do that.

WILLIE. Yes I do.

MINNIE. *No!* I can take care of myself. I always have.

WILLIE. I want to marry you.

MINNIE. *Oh*—be careful, Willie! We'll get into trouble again. [*Moving quickly away from him.*]

WILLIE. You belong to me, Minnie. You always did. You used to care. Why don't you now? I'm much more worth caring about now than I used to be.

MINNIE. Oh no, you're not. Not to me. For Mrs. Sylvester, yes. She *wants* you. You're just what she wants and she's just what you want.

WILLIE. What do *you* want?

MINNIE [*After a deep breath*]. To express myself.

WILLIE. You can express yourself and marry me too.

MINNIE. No I couldn't. I must be *free*. You don't understand, Willie. We speak a different language. My music—my art—my inner life don't mean anything to you.

WILLIE. Don't you fool yourself. I can keep up with you. Art's all very well for a little while—but in the long run nothing matters but love—love, Minnie. You want something to sit by the fire with.

MINNIE. But I've learned to do without love and the fire.

WILLIE. That's no reason you can't have it now. It's all the bigger when it does come. [*Taking her hands.*]

MINNIE [*Trying to get away*]. You mustn't, Willie.

WILLIE. Look at me.

MINNIE. No! I want to go. [*Backing away from him and sitting on the bench by the piano.*]

WILLIE. I'm never going to stop till I get you.

MINNIE. This isn't right!

WILLIE. Right—hell! I want you. I'll be good to you. I'll make you happy. I'm going to give you the whole world. I'm crazy about you, Minnie. [*Holding her as she sits and kissing her lips in a long kiss.* FRANCES *comes down the steps and stops in horrified amazement.*]

FRANCES. Are you at it *again?*

MINNIE. He didn't mean it.

WILLIE. Certainly I mean it. *I'm* free. *I've* got wings and space and flight and I'm going to fly, too.

MINNIE. Don't, Willie—don't. *Stop!*

FRANCES. What does this mean?

WILLIE. I'm expressing myself all right—and I'm going to keep right on.

[*They all talk at once.*]

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